

# *Comparative Analysis of The Geodemographic Policy of Bulgaria Until 2020*

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**Abstract** – In this article an attempt is made to analyze the demographic situation in Bulgaria at the end of 2020. On the basis of public data from the Bulgarian statistics a chronological assessment of the ongoing processes and phenomena within the Bulgarian state has been made. Problems have been identified and demographic policies have been proposed that may have a positive effect on overcoming demographic deficits in Bulgaria. The relevant conclusions and recommendations for imposing a new model of demographic development and imposing new priorities for national development have been made.

**Keywords** – Population, Demography, Problems, Regions, Development, Data, Information, Change, Natural Movement.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Geodemographic policy is a set of purposeful actions of state bodies and social institutions to regulate the reproduction of the population in a territorial aspect. It must influence the formation of a society-desired regime of natural reproduction (narrowed, simple, or extended) of the population, maintaining or changing trends in population dynamics, its structures and its migrations (1). Unfortunately, in Bulgaria today there is no clearly formulated demographic policy that is part of the overall strategy for the development of our country in the future or at least until 2050. Usually in our country measures are taken spontaneously in this direction, which, however, do not give the desired result and today the demographic crisis can definitely be called "demographic decline" in terms of the near and distant future of our country. That is why I offer you an analysis and vision for the overall demographic policy of the country. This vision is a system of predetermined main goals, objectives and priorities for influencing the demographic processes in Bulgaria. In principle, any development framework in this area is the basis of demographic development. It creates a legal and ideological space in which programmatic and real documents concerning births and families, human health and life expectancy, migration and a number of other aspects of demographic development can be created (2). It should be immediately emphasized that the analysis is until 2020 and does not include data from the 2021 census in Bulgaria. In practice, I accept the outlined trends as an assumption for change, which I want to check whether it corresponds to the results of the census in September 2021. The views of the proposed policies imply a series of management decisions for development of our country, which is unthinkable without a clear strategy. development of our human capital until the end of this period.

## II. THE DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION IN BULGARIA TODAY

In order to be able to set clear and achievable goals, first of all it is necessary to bring out the main problems in the demographic development of our country and to really determine the demographic situation in Bulgaria (1). The demographic

situation in our country today can be described as "catastrophic" because the population has been declining for 20 years, although according to many of our politicians our country during this period, or at least in the last 10 years has developed in socio-economic terms. During the period 1988 - 2020 the population of our country has decreased from 8,993,000. at 6,980,323 days, or about 0.78% on average per year. In the last 2-3 years the rate of decrease is about 0.56%, which is a good result based on previous periods, but it is mainly due to limited emigration flows due to lack of demographic resources in our country. According to this indicator, unfortunately, Bulgaria is a leading country and it is not clear how this place will soon give way. At the same time, politicians in our country forget the simple truth that the growing young population in a country is a prerequisite for its socio-economic development because it provides labor and an internal market (3). Until the mid-1990s, our population decline was determined by the country's negative migration balance, while in the last 15 years it has been determined by the negative values of natural population growth, which is defined as "depopulation". The decrease in the number of the Bulgarian population is also related to the decrease in its average geographical density of 81e / sq.km. in the late 80s of the twentieth century at 66d / sq.km. at the end of 2010 and up to 64d / sq. m in 2020 (2). While maintaining the current trends in the demographic development of our country, according to NSI forecasts until the end of 2021. The population is expected to decrease to about 6,900,000, and by 2050. to reduce to 5500000d. At the same time, the UN forecasts for a reduction of the population in Bulgaria by 35% by 2050, when its number is expected to reach about 50000d. (5) This raises the question of the very existence of the state of Bulgaria, because after about 40 years its population there will also be a radically different ethno-confessional structure at the expense of the reduction of the relative share of the Bulgarian ethnos (2).

During the years / 2004-2010 / the birth rate increased by 1 point / from 9% to 10% / at the expense of the increase of the birth rate in the cities / 10.6% compared to 8.6% in the villages /. During the same period, the number of children born increased, which in 2009. reached about 87,000, but in 2010. dropped to 76105. After 2010, Bulgaria returned to declining birth rates. Thus, in 2020, 59,440 children were registered in the country, of which 59,086 (99.4%) were live births. Compared to the previous year, the number of live births decreased by 2,452 children, or by 4%. As of 31.12.2020 the number of women of childbearing age is 1.452 million, as compared to the previous year decreased by 13 thousand, and compared to 2011 - by 199 thousand. In 2020, the number of children born to mothers under 18 is 2,897. The trend of increasing the number of children born to women aged 40 and over - from 2,284 in 2019 to 2,320 in 2020. Half (50.5%) of births in 2020 are first for the mother, 36.7% - second, and 12.6% - third and higher. Total fertility rate is one of the main indicators characterizing women's fertility. In 2020, the average number of live births per woman is 1.56 and compared to 2019 decreases by 0.02. The average age of women giving birth to their first child increases from 27.3 years in 2019 to 27.5 years in 2020. In regional terms, the average age at birth of the first child varies from 30.3 years for Sofia district (capital) to 22.5 years for Sliven district (5). This is also evident from the regional differences in the birth rate. This indicator has maximum values in the North-East and South-East regions / about 10.7% /, while the birth rate has minimum values in the North-West and North-Central regions / about 9% /. The population in Sliven region has the highest birth rate / 12.4% /, while the population in Vidin region has the lowest birth rate / about 7% /. The districts of Varna (11.5%), the city of Sofia and Burgas (about 12%) also have a relatively high birth rate. (4) We should not overlook the fact that despite the increase in the birth rate in Bulgaria, its values are below the average for Europe / 11% / and the world / 21% /. Същевременно броят на абортите у нас е почти 2 пъти по-голям от броя на родените деца. Това не може да не буди тревога у всички нас за бъдещето на страната ни. In this connection, I must point out another worrying fact. The average values of the total fertility rate in Bulgaria in the last 6 years have increased from 1.29 to 1.49 / 1.43 in the cities and 1.64 in the villages /, but it is still too far from the world average / 2, 6 / and from some countries in Europe / France, Norway, Iceland, Ireland, Great Britain, etc./ which have fertility around and over 2 times. The Northeastern and Southeastern regions (between 1.53 and 1.67) stand out with maximum fertility, where the population has a specific ethno-confessional structure. The lowest fertility is in women in the North Central / 1.37 / and the South-West region / 1.4 /. In the Veliko Tarnovo region, for example, the fertility is only 1.1, while in the Sliven region this indicator reaches 1.95. The fertility of women is also relatively higher in Yambol / 1,7 / and Targovishte / 1,67 / districts (4). However, the birth rate and fertility in the last 15 years are also related to the reduction of marriages, which is due to the increasing number of "Consensus marriages" / free cohabitation /. In this regard is the high share of "illegitimate children" in Bulgaria. Another important social problem is the non-recognition of paternity for about 1/3 of illegitimate children. In 2010 only 24 286 marriages were concluded, of which 79.3% in the cities / 23% are in Sofia /. For comparison, in 2020 22,172 legal marriages were registered - 7,026 less than the previous year, and the marriage rate is 3.2 ‰. Nearly three quarters of all registered marriages (16,124) are among the urban population. The marriage rate for the same year was only 3.2% compared to 15.5% at the beginning of the twentieth century. At the same time, in the last 20 years the level of divorce has remained around 1.5%. През 2010г. броят на разводите

достигна до 11012, или над 45% от браковете. The number of divorces in 2020 is 9,015, or 1,844 less than those registered in 2019. Of all terminated marriages, 78.5% refer to the urban population. Divorce was not the first for 9.6% of women and 10.6% of men who divorced in 2020. The average duration of a marriage until its dissolution is 15.7 years. The increase in the share of divorces and their intensity indicates a decline in the sustainability of marriages in Bulgaria, which is unfavorable in terms of population reproduction (4). The depopulation of the Bulgarian population is due not only to the slow increase in the birth rate, but also to the high values of the total mortality in our country. In the last 10 years this thesis has been confirmed. For example, the deaths in 2010 were 110,165 people or 14.6%, as 12.2% in cities and 20.7% in villages /, with 11% on average for Europe and 8% for the world. At the same time, the number of deaths in 2020 is 124,735, and the overall mortality rate is 18 ‰. Compared to the previous year, the number of deaths increased by 16,652, or 15.4%. The highest mortality of the population is in the districts of Vidin / 22.4% /, Montana / 20.5% / and Vratsa / 19% /, while the lowest values are in the districts of Kardzhali / 11.1% o /, Smolyan /12,1%.o/ and the city of Sofia / 11,8% o /. It is clear that the mortality rate is still too high and is expected to increase in the future due to the aging population. It should be noted that there is a certain "rejuvenation" of mortality in our country and maintaining a significant difference in the mortality rate among men / 15.8% / and women / 13.5% /. At the same time, Bulgaria continues to be in the top three European countries with the highest mortality caused by cardiovascular / over 66% / and cancer / about 20% / diseases, which is indicative of the socio-economic situation in our country and especially the unsatisfactory condition of our healthcare. Mortality among men (19.6 ‰) is higher than mortality among women (16.4 ‰). In 2020, 1,122 men per 1,000 women die. Strong differences in mortality among urban and rural populations continue. The mortality rate is higher in villages (24.2 ‰) than in cities (15.7 ‰). In 2020, the value of the indicator for total mortality by districts is in the range from 13.4 ‰ to 27.7 ‰. The highest mortality rates in the country are Vidin - 27.7 ‰, Montana - 25.5 ‰, Kyustendil and Gabrovo - 24 ‰. In six districts the mortality rate is lower than the total for the country, as the lowest is in Sofia (capital) - 13.4 (4). For comparison, in 2019 the indicator for total mortality by districts is in the range from 11.8 ‰ in Sofia (capital) to 22.9 ‰ in Vidin (5). In 2020 compared to 2019 in all districts of the country there is an increase in the value of the overall mortality rate. The largest increase is in the districts of Vidin - 4.8 per thousand points, Razgrad and Smolyan - 4.6 per thousand points. The smallest increase is in the districts of Burgas - 1.2 per thousand points, Sofia (capital) and Lovech - 1.6 per thousand points each. The premature mortality rate in 2020 (20.5%) remains unchanged compared to the previous 2019 (20.5%). There are significant differences between men and women in the values of the premature mortality rate. The number of deaths of women under the age of 65 is 13.7% of all deaths, and the value of this indicator for men is 26.6%. Bulgaria also stands out with high mortality due to injuries, which is related to the cultural level of the Bulgarian population. The poor health of the Bulgarian population and the high mortality rates determine the lag of our country by about 6-7 years in terms of average life expectancy / 73.58 years for the period 2005-2020 / compared to many European, Asian and American countries (8). With maximum life expectancy /77.57 years / is the population in Stara Zagora, Kardzhali / 75.29 years / and Smolyan / 75.06 years /, while with minimum values is this indicator in the districts of Targovishte /64.79 years /, Sliven /71.08 / and Dobrich / 71.6 /. Men in Bulgaria live an average of about 70 years, while women live an average of 77.24 years. during the period 2008-2020 (5). These trends in the natural reproduction of the Bulgarian population are determined both by the economic situation in the country / low standard of living associated with low incomes, rapidly changing labor market, etc./, and by its outdated age structure. However, the latter also has a purely economic dimension - shrinking domestic market / reduces the number of buyers both for purely demographic reasons and due to low pensions /, significant "demographic burden" of economically active and employed persons, etc. (6). The outdated age structure of the Bulgarian population is evident from the decrease in the share of persons under working age, the increase in the share of persons over working age and the increase in the number of elderly people who are still in the working age range. This is evident from the data in Table 1

Table.1 Relative share of persons under, in and over working age

| <i>Years</i>  | <i>Under working age</i> | <i>In working age</i> | <i>Above working age</i> |
|---------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>1990z.</i> | <i>21,6%</i>             | <i>55,5%</i>          | <i>22,9%</i>             |
| <i>1995z.</i> | <i>19,1%</i>             | <i>56,6%</i>          | <i>24,3%</i>             |
| <i>2001z.</i> | <i>16,3%</i>             | <i>59,2%</i>          | <i>24,5%</i>             |

|        |       |       |       |
|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| 2005z. | 14,8% | 62,4% | 22,8% |
| 2008z. | 14,5% | 63,2% | 22,3% |
| 2009z. | 14,4% | 63,1% | 22,5% |
| 2010z. | 14,1% | 62,2% | 23,7% |
| 2020   | 15,4% | 59,8% | 24,8% |

In just one year, the number of people under working age has decreased by about 5,000. In parallel with the decrease of the total number of the Bulgarian population, the population of working age decreases in absolute values - by about 10000d. for a year. The aging of the Bulgarian population is evident from its average age, which in 2001 was 40.4 years, and in 2010. reached 42 years, /46 years in the villages and 40.5 years in the cities /. In 2020, the average age increases to 44.0 years. As of 31.12.2020 the total age dependency ratio in Bulgaria is 56.7%, or each person in the dependent ages (under 15 and over 65 years) has less than two persons in active age. For comparison, in 2019 this ratio was 56.4%. Business considers the demographic factor not only in terms of demand (as a factor in the formation of aggregate consumer demand and its territorial differentiation), but also in terms of supply (as a factor in the formation of employment). The availability of highly educated, skilled and unemployed labor resources is an important factor in reducing funding for training and stimulating immigration in a given region of the workforce (7).

By 2030, the population of Bulgaria is expected to reach about 6,350,000 people, and the average life expectancy will reach about 70 years for men and over 77 years for women. Given the fact that premature mortality is about 24% / these are people who died at an age lower than the average life expectancy for men and women /, then at retirement age / according to the current retirement age for women of 60 years. and the expected increase in the retirement age for men to 65 / in 2030 is expected to be about 569,000 men and 1,107,000 women, or a total of 1,676,000. They will represent 22.8% of the total population of the country. However, it should not be forgotten that in the next 5 years, people with higher pensions will enter retirement age, while the oldest, who also have the highest share in the minimum pensions, will decrease significantly due to the high mortality rate among them. . At the same time, people under working age will decrease to 1 000000d. and their share will reach about 14% of the population. The population of working age until 2015 is expected to reach about 4,550,000, or 62% of the total. Between 40 and 65 however, 56.4% of people of working age will be old, which will continue to support the problem of the unfavorable ratio between employees and retirees. Today, there are about 2.3 million retirees per 3.2 million employed. However, over 13% of the employed are between 55 and 64 years old and in the next 5-6 years will join the group of pensioners. Now only about 1.4% of the employed are over 64 years old and it is not possible to expect an increase in their share against the background of the economic situation in our country. In the end, in my opinion, a significant increase in pensions in Bulgaria is possible only if the number of employees increases and the GDP of our country increases significantly. Given the expected short-term preservation of the unfavorable ratio between employees and pensioners, as well as the expected increase in pensioners with a higher coefficient, a rapid increase in pensions is almost impossible. Trends in births and deaths and the aging of the Bulgarian population lead to an increase in the imbalance in its gender structure (8). The relative share of women is constantly growing in 2010. reached 51.3% of the country's population. This leads to difficulties in recruiting labor for many areas of our economy. The reproduction of the able-bodied population is characterized by the coefficient of demographic replacement, which shows the ratio between the number of people of working age (15-19 years) and the number of people of working age (60-64 years). As of 31.12.2020, this ratio is 67. For comparison, in 2001, 100 people of working age were replaced by 124 young people. The highest value of the coefficient is in the districts of Sliven - 90, Sofia (capital) - 79 persons, and Varna - 78. The lowest indicator is in the districts of Smolyan - 41, Kardzhali - 48, and Pernik, where 100 persons leaving of working age shall be replaced by 50 persons of working age (5). Despite the aging of the Bulgarian population and the limitation of the potential contingent of emigrants, in 2010. the migration balance for our country is -3.3%, or 24190e. In 2020, 6,649 people have changed their current address from the country abroad, 57.1% of whom are men. Among the persons who emigrated from Bulgaria 36.1% are aged 20-39 years (4). The youngest emigrants (under 20) are 12.1%, and those aged 60 and over - 18.9% of all emigrants. In the last 10 years, more than 140,000 people have emigrated from our country. This is not in our national interests. At the same time, the negative processes in the Bulgarian economy maintain a relatively high internal migration mobility of the population / 2%, or over 150,000 days. The migrations to Sofia, Varna and Plovdiv continue annually, which in turn leads to a number of socio-economic and environmental problems in these cities (8). At the same time, the depopulation of significant regions of the country continues, which is a prerequisite for economic and political problems before

their development. We should not overlook the fact that there is too much difference in the migratory mobility of different ethnic communities in Bulgaria, which leads to territorial distinction between them and the desire to sever cultural contacts, which is unfavorable for the future development of Bulgaria. The number and structures of the population are determined by the size and intensity of its natural and mechanical (migratory) movement (9). The difference between live births and deaths is the natural increase of the population. After 1990, the demographic development of the country is characterized by negative natural population growth. In 2020, as a result of the negative natural growth, the country's population decreased by 65,649 people. The population decrease, measured by the natural growth rate, is minus 9.5 ‰ (4). The natural growth rate in the cities is minus 7.1 ‰, and in the villages - minus 16.0 ‰. The analysis of the demographic situation in our country inevitably leads to the conclusion of the existence of specific demographic problems in different regions. The most problematic in demographic terms are most of Northern Bulgaria, the Fore-Balkans, the Stara Planina region and Western Bulgaria (9).

### **III. THREATS TO THE NATIONAL AND ECONOMIC SECURITY OF BULGARIA RELATED TO THE DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION.**

1. The decrease in the number of the Bulgarian population and its geographical density lead to the weakening of our country in political, economic and military terms. Inevitably, the depopulation of the Bulgarian territory in the future will lead to an increase in interest in the settlement of unrelated to us ethnic and religious communities in our country.
2. The decrease in the relative share of the population under working age leads to problems in the future in providing labor for our economy, the development of our educational system and the provision of manpower for our defense and internal security. A similar problem is created by the growing imbalance in the gender structure of our population.
3. The aging of the population leads to the restriction of our internal market and an increase in social payments through the budget, which hinders our economic growth.
4. The decrease and aging of the Bulgarian population is ultimately associated with a rapid change in its ethno-confessional appearance, which in turn raises the question of the future political development of our country.
5. The continuing significant in volume and intensity emigration from our country leads to the weakening of its scientific, creative and economic potential.

### **IV. MAIN CHALLENGES FOR THE DEMOGRAPHIC POLICY OF BULGARIA UNTIL 2030.**

Given the main threats to Bulgaria related to the demographic situation in our country, the main goal of our demographic policy until 2030. it should be the gradual stabilization of the number and structure of the population and the creation of preconditions for its growth and rejuvenation while preserving its ethno-confessional image.

The main tasks, by solving which this goal can be achieved in our opinion are:

1. In the field of improving health care and increasing life expectancy:

Improving the quality of life; Reducing the level of premature mortality, especially that in childhood and adolescence and caused by medical errors; Reducing morbidity, trauma and disability; Improving the living conditions of the chronically ill and the disabled by creating opportunities for their realization; Expanding health prevention and improving diagnostics; Restriction of drug addiction, smoking and alcohol consumption; Expanding the opportunities for sports for the younger generations;

2. In the field of stimulating the birth rate and strengthening the Bulgarian family: Stimulating financially and morally the increase of the birth rate and fertility mainly of the highly educated strata of our population; Creating conditions for the realization of the younger generations; Social protection and material encouragement of parenthood;

3. In the field of migratory mobility of the Bulgarian population:

Providing livelihoods and attracting immigrants from the Bulgarian diaspora; South-Restriction of emigration flows by creating new jobs and conditions for normal existence in Bulgaria;

4. Remigration wave to Bulgaria. When we talk about demography in Bulgaria, we have to talk about one thing only - increasing the young population. This can be done in several ways - keeping the young population to stay in Bulgaria - not by force, but with conditions under which they want to stay in Bulgaria and create families and children here; re-immigration wave as it is possible from Moldova, Ukraine, the Russian Federation and others.

## V. CONCLUSION

During the studied period in Bulgaria for the solution of the existing demographic problems measures are carried out, which are characterized by emphasized continuity. However, they are characterized by a narrow scope of implementation, unrealistic definition of the main site in some of their areas, inefficiency of some of the principles on which they are built, inconsistency between regulations and applied actions for their implementation and a number of other shortcomings. This predetermines the impossibility to fulfill the goal set as fundamental in the implementation of this type of measures during the studied period - achieving sustainable demographic development. This provision is used to present reliable data to the public about the demographic problems of our country and the ways to solve them in this direction should be developed demographic policies. The development of a system for information provision of the demographic policy, including through the creation of specialized radio and TV programs, the publishing of newspapers and magazines, the development of curricula. Forming an advertising campaign on maintaining a healthy lifestyle and raising more children in families. The use of the media in promoting the goals of demographic policy, etc. For example, to introduce a comprehensive approach to support families and children by linking social benefits and child benefits to social services and with a comprehensive assessment (not only of family income, poverty line, etc.) of child care in the family school attendance, school success, reduction of excessively early marriages and births, etc.). Ultimately, the implementation of the Concept for demographic policy of Bulgaria until 2030 presented to you. implies the unification of the efforts of state and public institutions, changes in the legislation, the development of some measures in the regional strategies and development plans and a number of other urgent actions. In this direction, the role of the scientific circles in Bulgaria is also significant, which unfortunately stand aside from many similar problems facing the country. A strategic task for Bulgaria is to be able to replenish its demographic resource through a comprehensive strategy for the development of our country in the near and long term, as the main place in it is occupied by the strategy for the demographic development of Bulgaria.

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